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RELIGIONWATCH

For more than two decades, Religion Watch has covered religions around the world, particularly looking at the unofficial dimensions of religious belief and behavior.

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Vitality still marks old and new Pentecostal denominations

The Pentecostals, at least on a denominational level, seem to be the one segment of Christianity not experiencing membership doldrums, with the Assemblies of God (AG) being a good case in point. The August issue of the magazine *Charisma* celebrates the centennial of the denomination with an in-depth overview of the denomination. It is difficult to know the actual size of the church body due

to the fact that it counts regular adherents and attendees rather than members, leading to estimates of 3.1 million in the U.S. and 68 million worldwide, according to writer Steve Strang. He adds that the denomination has grown stateside by 250 percent, with recent statistics showing that AG growth

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Emerging evangelical leaders take on broad agenda

The next generation of evangelical leaders is likely to be multicultural, philanthropy-minded, technologically savvy, artistically creative and ecumenical, while balancing prolife and environmental concerns.

Those are the predominant values and causes evident among the 33 young evangelicals *Christianity Today* magazine (July/August) profiles as the new face of Christian leadership. While not pretending to be a representative sample of emerging evangelical leadership, the magazine consulted ministry leaders, "highly connected social media mavens, and millennials themselves" to create their list. They are said to represent the millennial generation, born in

the 1980s and '90s, and having "grown up as digital natives. Most of them seamlessly incorporate technology into their lives, careers and ministries. They also come from the most racially diverse generation in American history: More than 4 out of 10 U.S. millennials are non-white." In the list of 33 emerging leaders, 13 are Asian, Hispanic, or African-American. Ten of the leaders are women.

Connecting missions, philanthropy with entrepreneurialism, is an ongoing concern for about one-third of the emerging leaders. This could be seen in 32-year-old Claire

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More than 4 out of 10 U.S. millennials are non-white.

Evangelical leaders' broad agenda *(cont. from p. 1)*

Diaz-Ortiz's philanthropic work with Twitter and Joshua Dubois, a former faith advisor for the Obama administration who founded Values Partnership, which connects faith communities with business and government groups. Only three of these emerging lead-

ers are involved in government or political activism. Lila Rose, 25, is the founder of Live Action, which engages in controversial stealth tactic and social media efforts against abortion. Rose is a Catholic convert and at least one of the other emerging leaders is a

Catholic. Among the few dealing with gay rights is a celibate gay professor who avoids "contentious political debates or suggestions of reparation therapy."

(Christianity Today, 365 Gunderson Dr., Carol Stream, IL 60188.)

Younger Muslims press for changing of the guard in American Islamic activism, advocacy

The rising generation of American Muslim leaders are taking a more assertive stance in activism and advocacy on civil rights issues, according to a report by the Middle Eastern

news service *Al Jazeera* (July 24). The recent "iftar" or annual consultation between U.S. Muslim leaders and President Obama met with a wave of criticism from younger Muslims that participants in these meetings are failing to defend the rights of Muslims. Sahar Aziz writes that "Through a sign-on petition and social media campaigns calling for a boycott of the iftar, young Muslim men and women brought to light the growing discontent with older, primarily male, and immigrant 'official' leadership by a younger, more gender diverse generation of Muslims." These efforts have generated a debate in the Muslim community about the dissatisfaction with civil rights work.

But Aziz adds that even the current state Muslim rights advocacy and activism is "leagues ahead of its dismal state just after 9/11 [when]... few Muslims... had the skills or training to engage with media, write

persuasive op-eds, file civil rights lawsuits, and negotiate public policy at the state and federal level. As a result, most Muslim American leaders today are self-taught advocates [usually engineers or doctors] whose training is on the job in a high-stakes environment." The emerging leaders argue that the current Muslim leadership's inexperience has been exploited by prosecutors and policy makers who have treated it as a fifth column in need of surveillance and

other infringements on civil rights. They also say that Muslim representatives should be selected based on their professional expertise rather than their popularity or religious piety. ■



President Thomas Jefferson's copy of the Quran on display for guests attending the 2014 White House Iftar. Photo by Jill DeWitt of the Curator's Office

Vitality among Pentecostal groups *(cont. from p. 1)*

continues to outpace the American population. The denomination is an exception in other ways: One-third of the AG is now 25 years old or younger, and 52 percent are under the age of 35. Two thousand AG churches have been added in the past six years in the U.S. Strang writes that much of the growth has come from ethnics; 41 percent of the AG is non-white, with almost 22 percent being Hispanic and 10 percent white.

But the growth in the AG has been the result of planning and leadership change. Although studies have shown the denomination, especially its churches, have moved in the post-denominational direction, de-emphasizing such hallmarks as speaking in tongues to attract unchurched seekers, it has also held on to many strict teachings, especially on sexual purity. Recent leaders Tom Trask and George Wood brought in a new generation of young leaders, revamping its publications—servicing congregations with resources promoting “healthy churches—and reorganizing denominational departments that often acted like independent kingdoms. Strang writes that the denomination has been generally quiet in the “cultural wars,” although that may be changing as leaders have increasingly taken strong stands on gay marriage and the Hobby Lobby case.

Another sector of Pentecostalism in North America that has proven resilient is the charismatic revival that originated with the Toronto Blessing phenomenon of the 1990s. In the journal *PentecoStudies* (Vol. 13, No. 2), Mark

Cartledge writes that the Toronto Blessing experienced at a church in that city was once a major pilgrimage site for charismatics and Pentecostals for its ecstatic worship and “signs and wonders.” The thousands of regular visitors that the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship attracted from around the world eventually declined to a small but steady stream. Sociologists pronounced that the phenomenon had run its course and was in a state of inevitable decline.

But in looking at the years since, Cartledge finds the fellowship has spawned a global network, now called Catch the Fire (CTF), as well as a host of sister congregations and networks that are spreading the revival. In recent years, CTF has espoused apostolic teachings—holding that God appoints prophets and apostles—and practice the ritual of “soaking prayer,” where participants are prayed over and seek to open themselves to God’s presence for a few hours at a time. CTF is now planting churches in North

America and Europe. Rather than the Toronto Blessing dying out, its propagators and collaborators (considered apostles and prophets), such as Heidi Baker and Che Ahn, have become “superbrokers” in spreading the revival on a global scale. CTF is “very much a part of a wider set of revivalist networks and its impact on world Christianity via its participation in these networks appears to be growing,” Cartledge concludes.

(*Charisma*, 600 Rhinehart Rd., Lake Mary 32746; *PentecoStudies*, <https://www.equinoxpub.com/journals/index.php/PENT/issue/current>.) ■

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"The (Assemblies of God) denomination has been generally quiet in the 'cultural wars,' although that may be changing as leaders have increasingly taken strong stands on gay marriage and the Hobby Lobby case."

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Jehovah's Witnesses' recruitment efforts extend beyond doorstep

Jehovah's Witnesses are moving beyond their traditional strategy of door-to-door evangelism as they seek to reach a wider base of potential converts through a more non-confrontational approach. A *BBC News* article (July 7) reports that a strategy pioneered in New York City three years ago where the Witnesses distribute literature at train stations and other busy places has spread throughout cities in Britain and Ireland. But rather than approaching passersby in the style of their door-

to-door approach, the church's volunteers let people come to them; they usually say little but stand at distribution tables smiling and handing out Watchtower literature, according to the article. A spokesman for the Witnesses says the new strategy is an addition to, rather than a departure from, their door-to-door work.

But some observers, such as former Jehovah's Witness writer Scott Terry, say the new method is in response to the widespread member apathy about door-to-door

missions. The movement did not provide figures on how many converts the approach has produced, but adherents say they are optimistic the new tactic is making an impact. One volunteer says the non-confrontational approach is better for secular and people, giving them more control in finding out about the religion. It is not the first time that the Witnesses have tried other proselytism methods; they have used radio, movies and, more recently, the Internet to reach people. ■

Religious editors and sources battle on Wikipedia

Religion has become one of the most contested and "vandalized" topics on Wikipedia, the collaboratively edited online encyclopedia. In a July 24 *Religion News Service* article (with support by Google), Sarah Pulliam Bailey notes that religion is among several of the top 100 altered topics on Wikipedia. She cites a recent list by the FiveThirtyEight Data Lab, among the most edited topics on the site are Jesus, the Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muhammad, Islam and Scientology. Volunteer editors of Wikipedia, known as Wikipedians, often face a challenge in stopping online hate speech directed toward religious subjects, people and groups. Bailey reports that Mormonism has been another contested topic, with church adherents and opponents often sparring via their additions and subtractions of controversial topics related to the religion, particularly polygamy and sacred but secret temple rituals.

Part of the tension comes from the diverse makeup

of Wikipedians—"a large percentage self-identify as atheists, followed by Christians, Muslims, 'Pastafarians' (devotees of a satirical religion known as the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster) and Jews," she adds. Most of the edits to Wikipedia articles, especially the ones on religion, are made by men, with women accounting for

just seven percent of the edits, according to a 2011 University of Minnesota study. It is particularly the smaller religions that have the most passionate editors, although the more obscure ones are covered less adequately. One editor says that "An enemy (or friend) of a 'cult' in Ecuador could find sources

supporting their personal positions and the obscurity of the topic in English will make it hard or impossible for most of us to confirm or deny." He adds that by using Wikipedia's rules of independent verification, it can be difficult to confirm facts about religions and religious figures, "especially when there's a range of opinions about what events took place and what they mean." ■



Religious topics are one of the top 100 most frequently vandalized on Wikipedia. // Creative Commons image by Taylor McKnight

Competition stirring for religious TLDs on the Internet

While a number of new generic top-level domains (TLDs) on the Internet are likely to end up as failures due to the sudden proliferation of options for users (with .com possibly continuing to enjoy a dominant position anyway), the launching of some new religion-related TLDs may help some religious groups to increase their online profile. Among nearly 2,000 TLD proposals submitted to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), with a few hundred already live, few were submitted by religious groups. The most prominent one is .catholic, which will be owned by the Holy See (Pontifical Council for Social Communication). The TLD .bible has been granted to the American Bible Society. Worth mentioning too are .lds and .mormon (LDS Church). A Turkish

company has submitted .islam. .shia and .halal, while the Aga Khan Foundation has submitted .imat and .ismaili. However, considering the costs and requirements involved, few religious groups applied for their own TLD. But for English-speaking Christian denominations, there will now be an opportunity to create high profiles for themselves online.

Next month, the TLD .church will go live. There is currently a sunrise period for .church, in order to allow holders of trademarks to apply for their .church domain name. From September 10 to 16, an early-access program will allow people willing to pay a hefty price (from over \$12,000 to a little under \$200) to acquire their name. Then there will be general availability on a first-come first-served basis. Some names have been reserved by the registry and won't

be made available (e.g. christian.church, catholic.church or baptist.church). Moreover, the registry won't sell all names at the same price. Some names are considered premium and will be sold at a higher price even at the time of general availability. While some observers, such as David Topping, writing in *The Desert Connection* (July 16) are skeptical about the impact of the new TLD and its usefulness (beside brand protection), the rapidly evolving environment of the Internet makes such forecasts uncertain: owning their own .church domain name may be part of long-term online strategies for securing advantageous locations in cyberspace—even if the best name will be worth little without a quality website built on it.

(*The Desert Connection*, <http://desertconnection.org/is-there-a-church-in-your-future/>.) ■

WHAT THE

CURRENT RESEARCH

REVEALS ABOUT TODAY'S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

01 In a paper delivered at the CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions) conference at Baylor University (Waco, Texas) in early June, J. Gordon Melton analyzed atheist groups as organizations similar to new religious movements (without a supernatural component) and the new public presence of atheism on the American scene. Actually, the percentage of atheists has remained stable for as long as

they have been counted. There were 4 million atheists in 1944, and they then made 4 percent of the U.S. population. They still make 4 percent today, but the population has tripled in the meantime, and thus atheism has grown in absolute numbers.

Several atheists and humanist organizations are competing with different approaches. The American Humanist Association, originally a split from the Unitarians, has nearly 200 centers around the country

and offers humanist celebrations such as weddings. American Atheists (founded in 1963 by Madalyn Murray O'Hair) follows a strong atheist line and has launched in late July the first atheism-dedicated television channel, *Atheist TV*, presented as an attempt to fill a void beside a plethora of religious channels. In the 1960s, upon the

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Current research *(cont. from p. 5)*

initiative of a very radical reform rabbi, a secular, non-theistic congregation was founded and led to the organization of the Society for Humanistic Judaism. There were splits over the history of atheist and humanist movements, and there are now seven organizations active at the national level. However, all these organizations combined gather less than 200,000 members, according to Melton.

02 More members of religious communities around the world were forced to flee their homes last year than at any time in the recent past, according to the annual report on religious freedom by the U.S. State Department. *Reuters* (July 29) quotes the report as saying, “In almost every corner of the globe, mil-

lions of Christians, Muslims, Hindus and others representing a range of faiths were forced from their homes on account of their religious beliefs.” Hundreds of thousands of Christians had fled three years of civil war in Syria and in the Central African Republic, lawlessness and sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims had reportedly resulted in the displacement of more than a million people in 2013. The report also highlighted anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar that led to up to 100 deaths and 12,000 being forced from their homes in the area of the town of Meiktila in early 2013.

03 A unique snapshot of Syrian public opinion reports that only a small minority supports the idea of an Islamic state led by insurgents.

The survey, conducted by Opinion Research Business, which specializes in polling in conflict areas, conducted 1,014 face-to-face interviews, covering 12 of Syria’s 14 provinces consisting of areas controlled by the government and rebels, including Raqqa, the Islamic State’s stronghold. The Islamic State, an offshoot of Al Qaeda, enforces a strict interpretation of Islam, which has resulted in the execution of Shi’ite Muslims and increased disaffection from many civilians. The survey finds that only 4 percent of Syrians believe that the Islamic State insurgents represent their interests. The Islamic State also wants to erase national boundaries from the Mediterranean to the Gulf and return the region to a “medieval-style caliphate,” reports the news service *Reuters* (July 8). ■

Polish Catholicism facing dissent, secular pressures

A special report on Poland in *The Economist* (June 28) finds a robust economy but a more divided and less vital religious sector. The magazine reports that the Catholic Church’s unifying role while promoting dialogue on issues such as Jewish-Christian relations and democracy in the past has been eclipsed by a fear of dissent from within and liberalization in the wider society. The recent closure of a parish by the archbishop of Warsaw-Praga, where popular suspended priest, Wojciech Lemanski had criticized the church’s position on in-vitro fertilization (IVF), as well as berating church officials for mishandling sexual abuse cases and tolerating anti-Semitism among Catholics. Church officials say that the suspension was due only to Lemanski’s dissent on IVF. The article reports that the church in Poland has made something of a comeback after the 1990s, when it was accused of being too political and overly concerned with gaining

returned properties lost during the communist era. Today people are drawn to the church for prayer and meditation rather than for practical help.

Although the number of seminarians has dropped (from 4,800 in the early 2000s to around 3,000 today), the country still produces a quarter of Europe’s vocations. The Polish church sees challenges outside the church as well as inside. The fear of “liberalization” harming the church was recently on display in a conflict about “gender studies, which to “some hardline Catholics has become a catch-all term for radical feminism, liberal abortion politics and other social trends they dislike.” The alarm was started last summer when Tadeusz Pieronek, a bishop, pronounced that the “ideology of gender presents a threat worse than Nazism and communism combined. Conservative politicians joined the effort, convening a parliamentary group, ‘Stop Gender Ideology.’” ■

The bewitching of Romanian politics

Paranormal and occult beliefs and practices are increasingly prominent in the media in Romania and are even playing a role in politics, writes Doru Pop in the online *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* (Summer). There has been a long history of mystical and occult influences in politics in Romania—from the fascist Legion of the Archangel Michael in the early 20th century to the paranormal practices and beliefs of the Ceausescus before their downfall. Pop writes that occult influences in Romanian society and politics have only grown with the expansion of the media. The author notes that surveys show a high rate of conventional religiosity in the form of Orthodox Christian affiliation and belief, as well as a steady undercurrent of occult and paranormal interest. A recent survey found that a “vast majority” of Romanians would rather use the services of witches and “bioenergetics” specialists than those of professional psychologists.

Pop writes that the Romanian news media and

its trend of “infotainment” have further popularized the role of witches and paranormal specialists, such as clairvoyants and astrologers. Often these occult practitioners are featured on popular television shows and asked to make predictions about political events and officials. The article concludes with a case study of the 2009 presidential campaign where it was widely reported that the debates between the candidates were influenced by psychics and other spiritual groups. The occult symbol of the “violet flame” was prominent in the campaign of Basescu, who was seen wearing violet neckties and sweaters, with many of his staff wearing the same colors. A year later a group of white witches met outside the Congress of the Social Democrat Party to cast spells and exhort the violet flame out of the party. In 2012, there were reports that Basescu was “attacked” by spells of black magic and that he was only protected through the intervention of “white witches.”

(*Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, <http://jsri.ro/ojs/index.php/jsri/index>.) ■

Saudi Arabia’s religious scholars and jihadism: a dilemma for government

The Saudi system and its legitimacy are based on an alliance between the royal family and the religious scholars and preachers belonging to the Wahhabite school of Islam. But new rifts have emerged between those partners over the influence of jihadism, according to the geopolitical intelligence firm *Stratfor* (July 30). A total of 100 imams, including 17 in the Saudi capital, refused to condemn a recent jihadist attack on the Saudi border with Yemen, which killed four border guards as well as another Saudi citizen. While the Saudi regime has given strong support to the Wahhabite

ideology (and to spreading it across the world), it has always relied on religious scholars to prevent the rise of anti-government opposition, whether secular or religious. *Stratfor* mentions various occurrences, the latest one having been the defeat of the Saudi branch of Al Qaeda in 2005-2006 with the support of religious preachers.

According to *Stratfor*, there has been a process of internal fragmentation among religious scholars and preachers, with some groups being opposed to reforms initiated by the government. Moreover, the overlap between the ideas of some Wahhabi scholars

and those of transnational jihadists should not be overlooked, especially at a time jihadism is experiencing a new vigor in the Middle East. The unusual move to make the issue public seems to indicate that the government wants to create a national consensus against the dissident scholars while they are still a small group. It knows that it needs the support of the preachers in order to effectively counteract the jihadist threat, which has been in part nurtured by ideological motives diffused from Saudi Arabia.

(*Stratfor*, 221 West 6th Street, Suite 400, Austin, TX 78701 – <http://www.stratfor.com>.) ■



The Temple Mount, known in Hebrew as Har haBáyit, and in Arabic as the Haram al-Sharif, is one of the most important religious sites in the Old City of Jerusalem. // Creative Commons image by Andrew Shiva

Demands for complete control over the Temple Mount growing among religious Jews

While such news is unlikely to be peace-promoting in the current context in the Middle East, a growing number of religious Jews, primarily among religious Zionists, but also some Orthodox, feel that visits to the Temple Mount are permissible and that the Temple should be built on what has been for centuries a Muslim holy site, writes Andrew Friedman in *Jerusalem Report* (June 30). Since the State of Israel gained control over the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967, the rule among religious Jews was that they should refrain to visit the site of the ancient temple. A few exceptions were the very small activist groups wanting to get the site under Jewish control and advocating visits to the sites, which

were perceived by Muslims as provocations. But it is no longer a non-issue, the number of Jews visiting the Temple Mount has been increasing. However, prayers by non-Muslims remain forbidden on the site, as well as Israeli nationalist gestures (e.g. waving an Israeli flag). Some politicians advocate for changes, although the Israeli government has assured the current policy will stay in force.

On July 3, a government minister belonging to a nationalist religious party, Housing and Construction Minister Uri Ariel, broke a taboo among high-ranking government officials by calling “to build a real temple on the Temple Mount,” according to *The Times of Israel* (July 5). The newspaper reports that the issue of the Tem-

ple Mount has slowly emerged at the grassroots level, making what used to be a theoretical issue into a practical one, with some (religious) people starting to visit a site that was supposed to remain off-limits. While the government is unlikely to change the status quo, supporters of the building of the Third Temple are convinced that it will come without waiting for the Messiah and that “he who controls the Temple Mount will ultimately control Jerusalem and ultimately control the land of Israel,” as a longtime Temple Mount activist explained to Friedman.

(*Jerusalem Report*, P.O. Box 1805, Jerusalem 91017, Israel, <http://www.jpost.com/JerusalemReport/Home.aspx>; *The Times of Israel*, <http://www.timesofisrael.com>.) ■

Faith-inspired schools losing market share but still playing role in Africa

A majority of schools in Africa used to be faith-inspired, but their share has dropped with the expansion of public facilities. Today, such schools' average market share is probably around 15 percent (slightly more than secular private schools), although there are variations in schools from one country to another, with some growing at a faster pace than public schools, according to articles in the *Review of Faith & International Affairs* (Summer). Both for primary and secondary education, countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (69.8 and 66 percent) and Sierra Leone (54.9 and 41.6 percent) show the highest share of Faith-inspired schools (FIS), something that may be linked to conflict and state failure, but also to historical reasons, write Clarence Tsimpo and Quentin Wodon (World Bank).

Based on evidence from 16 countries, it appears that FIS do not reach the poor more than other schools, but they do serve children in poverty and often make special efforts to do so. While reaching the poor tends to be part of their ethos, they have to deal with budgetary constraints. Moreover, Tsimpo and Wodon write, "while less expensive to attend than private secular schools, [FIS] tend to be more expensive for households than public schools" During the colonial period, Christian missionaries provided the majority of formal education in Africa. In most African countries, Muslims still average

fewer years in school and are less likely to be literate than Christians, writes Melina Platas Izama (Makerere Institute of Social Research, Kampala, Uganda). The gap in schooling of Muslim children has, however, disappeared entirely from some countries (Tanzania and Uganda). It persists in other countries, such as Nigeria, even after taking into account factors such as regional or ethnic inequalities.

In a country such as Mali, notes Helen N. Boyle (Florida State University), Islamic madrassas (combining religious studies with the teaching of core subjects) have been growing at a faster rate than public schools. Interestingly,

madrassa pedagogy has also been changing from a traditional Islamic mode of transmission to a more modern type of education—not only memorizing, but also explaining content. Jill Olivier (University of Cape Town) and Wodon find that in Ghana, some of the Christian and Islamic schools are perceived to be of high quality, but there are concerns that this would not be the case with some new schools, both



Sankore Madrasah in Mali, West Africa.
Creative Commons image by Baz Lecocq

Christian (including Pentecostal) and Islamic; they are responding to a lack of alternatives as well as to the desire of parents for faith-inspired education.

(*Review of Faith & International Affairs*, P.O. Box 12205, Arlington, VA 22219-2205 – www.tandfonline.com/rfia.) ■

EXPLORE THIS ISSUE'S



FINDINGS & FOOTNOTES

01 Sociologists Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel provide a thorough examination of the postmodern “emerging Christianity” movement in their new book *The Deconstructed Church* (Oxford University Press, \$35). Emerging Christianity has been a diffuse movement, stressing its anti-institutional nature with participants divided among themselves about whether they go by the designation “emerging” or “emergent” (with the former the more conservative strand) as well as whether the movement itself is defunct. Through case studies of congregations and surveys, Marti and Ganiel find that emerging communities encourage a particular religious orientation marked by strong internal pluralism—there are few requirements of belief or memberships (with even non-believers participating). Yet there is also a high rate of participation among those attending.

The authors are convinced that the movement will persist and even thrive due to its embrace of pervasive religious individualism and pluralism in Western societies. But it may also function as a

stopover for young adults before they settle down and find a more family-friendly church, even if its ideas and practices have wider influence. With Marti based in the U.S. and Ganiel in Northern Ireland, the authors are good in showing the transnational nature of the movement, as well as its diversity of practices, teachings and worship styles. In the U.S., emerging congregations often position themselves against the evangelical Christianity, particularly megachurches, while these groups in the UK, most notably the Icon community in Belfast, are formed by contestation with mainstream churches and secularism.

02 *An Anxious Age* (Image, \$18.54) by Joseph Bottum, is an unusual book, being part conservative political critique and part historical and sociological commentary as it seeks to define what he calls the “post-Protestant” class and its implications for “American exceptionalism.” Bottum writes that the loss of mainline Protestantism as a social force has left a vacuum in providing a common moral vocabulary for Americans that made them uniquely religious in the

Western world. Through a series of vignettes and analysis of sociological research, the author argues that while the mainline’s descendents have shed their forebearer’s denominations and theology (usually opting for the “spiritual but not religious” label), they have retained a similar moral certainty on a host of social and political issues (ranging from environmentalism to abortion). These cultural pathways have been generalized to the rest of upper-middle and middle class America, encompassing Catholics, Jews and other Protestants who have left their religions behind.

The second part of the book is more original and timely, as Bottum seeks to show how evangelicals and especially Catholics have tried to fill the religious-moral space left behind by the mainline. He traces how American Catholicism during the past two decades has lost a share of churchly bricks and mortar influence through the priest sex abuse crisis and the resulting law suits, for instance, while gaining a new role as a seedbed of moral and political ideas. This is most evident in the unique

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Findings & Footnotes *(cont. from p. 10)*

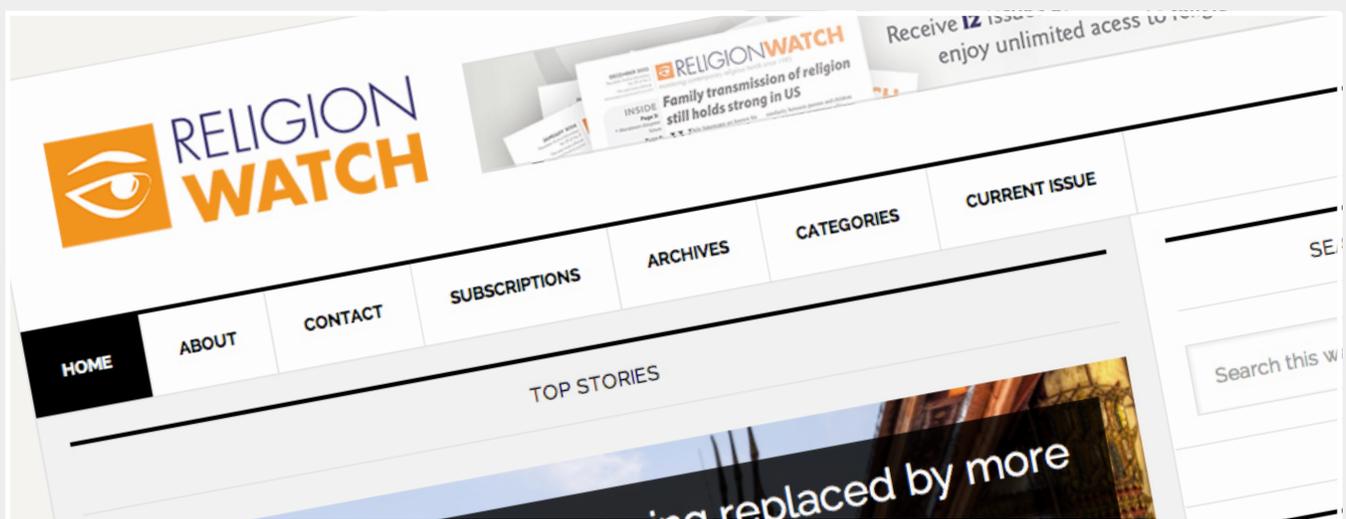
coalition that developed between evangelicals and Catholics with the former borrowing church teachings on natural law, just war theory and the dignity of the person. The Catholic factor retains its influence among a new generation of politicians, lawyers and judges, going all the way up to the Supreme Court, as well as in the pro-life movement. But Bottum concludes that neither evangelicals nor Catholics have been successful in filling the

moral-religious space left by the mainline for most Americans—it may be that Catholicism carries too much institutional weight and evangelicalism too little to play such a role.

03 The appeal of “religious exoticism” and how such religions become domesticated to serve therapeutic needs is the topic of Veronique Altglas’s new book *From Yoga*

to Kabbalah (Oxford University Press, \$35). Altglas focuses on two case studies, the Kabbalah Centre in Israel, the UK, France, and Brazil, and Hindu-based movements in France and Britain. Both movements have gained followings by downplaying their cultural and religious roots, with the Hindu groups stressing an Eastern spiritual identi-

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Religion Watch's upgraded website brings decades of information to your fingertips

This month, we are happy to unveil our new website, still at <http://www.religionwatch.com>. The new design closely follows the format of the newsletter, including incorporating artwork into articles in the

archives from decades ago. Articles are easily searchable both by subject and by the categories featured in each issue (for instance, “current research” and “findings & footnotes”), and the table of contents now allow readers to get

a longer preview of each article in current and back issues.

We thank publisher Debra Mason and web designers T.J. Thomson and David Herrera for the time, work and talent they put into the site. ■

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Findings & Footnotes *(cont. from p. 11)*

ty and the Kabbalah Centre’s invention of a non-Jewish Kabbalah. The author shows how such “universalizing” strategies have their limits; such a process is difficult and outsiders—non-Jews at the Kabbalah Centre, and non-Hindus and non-Indians at yoga centers—realize that specific cultures and religions are still present in such groups, creating a measure of discomfort, leading to a low retention rate.

There are few conversions either to Judaism or Hinduism among seekers who participate in these groups, even though there is some prestige in “discovering” one’s Jewish identity in the Brazilian case study. At the same time, co-religionists and even some members oppose watering down the tradition, as seen when the Kabbalah Centre in Paris was forced to close in the face of such opposition. Altglas argues that these attempts at universalizing religious traditions are very much in keeping with the cosmopolitan needs of the “new petite bourgeois” class. This class stresses such values as “authenticity, aesthetics, freedom, peace, and loving interpersonal relationships,” and see their involvement in such groups as a way of social positioning; thus the frequent referral to spiritual techniques as transferable “tools” for enhancing both one’s personal and professional life. She concludes that these groups may be part of the spiritual marketplace, engaging spiritual entrepreneurs and “bricoleurs,” but they are also bound by the constraints and preferences of this new class. ■

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